

A man with a beard and short hair is sitting in a church pew, looking towards the camera. The background features a large, colorful stained glass window with various figures and patterns. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the window.

STUDY 4

CHURCH FOR YOUR FRIENDS

Have you ever been on holiday in some far away place, and you've been enjoying the sights, sounds, food, culture and entertainment... and you send a postcard to a family member or friend saying, 'wish you were here!'

Well, have you ever had that kind of 'wish you were here' moment in church? The kind of moment where you're sitting in church thinking, "This is so good. I wish I'd invited my friend today"? Maybe it's been the opposite, and things are so dull or cold or complicated or poorly done that you're thinking "I'm so glad my friend isn't here!" In this study we're going to think through how our church gatherings can actually be helpful to visiting non-believers. And the great thing about our church is that we have believers and non-believers together every time we meet.

INTELLIGIBLE CHURCH

1. When your family has visitors at home, what sort of things do you do (before, during & after) to make them feel welcome? (*Take time and give careful thought to what you might just do automatically.*)

2. Now think: When we as a church family have visitors, what sort of things can we do to make them feel welcome?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. (You might remember we looked at this passage a few weeks ago.)

When the Corinth church met, many members liked to ‘babble’ in what they called the ‘gift of tongues.’ Paul makes the point that we should make sure our meetings are ‘welcoming and understandable’.

3. What evidence is there that non-believers are invited, welcomed and expected?

4. What is the effect of ‘incomprehensible’ tongues on the non-believer?

1 Corinthians 14:23-25

²³ So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or non-believers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

²⁴ But if a non-believer or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, ²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

Tongues and Prophecy

Earlier in the chapter, Paul explains that ‘tongues’ are ‘uttering mysteries by the Spirit. (14:2)’ In contrast, prophecy is ‘speaking to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort’ (14:3).

5. What is the possible effect of 'comprehensible' prophesy on a non-believer?

Paul is teaching believers to adapt church because of non-believers. Believers often think we should change church WHEN non-believers come, but we should change church SO THAT non-believers come!

SAM CHAN TIME

Listen to the video clip titled '*Evangelistic Worship*' from Sam Chan and make notes (you can find the video at mpc.org.au/friendsforlife).



Evangelistic Worship

6. Do you agree with Sam Chan (& Tim Keller) about evangelistic worship?

7. When Sam talks about a "McDonalds moment", he's talking about that moment in church when you experience something that you know would have been ideal for your non-believing friend. Maybe the gospel was so clear, or an issue so well addressed, or morning tea was so good, or people were so friendly. Share when you've experienced a moment like this at church.

TAKE IT HOME

Over the last two decades, our vision has committed us to church activity which is welcoming and understandable to newcomers. Our strategy is simple. We believe newcomers, seekers, and long-term Christians can all grow in the same soil. If what we do in church is made understandable and clear, and if we do our best to be sensitive and open to newcomers each week so that they understand what we're doing and feel genuinely welcome, their experience of church may well be revolutionary.

The gathering of our MPC congregations each Sunday is both a demonstration and declaration of the Gospel. But our Sunday meetings are also a declaration of the Gospel to those who do not know God. It is a declaration that God is gathering a people for Himself, and that He is at work in the world. Therefore what we do when we meet will reflect the Gospel and the God behind it. It will be characterised by grace and not legalism, and will be understandable and comfortable for all who come; it will be culturally sensitive so as to challenge and offend only where God does; and will be an invitation for those who are not yet part of his kingdom to taste and see the new community God is building in Jesus.

8. What difference will 'being welcoming and understandable' make to how we do church? (some of these will be more relevant to you than others, but it's important to understand why everyone involved on a Sunday does things the way they do)
 - Welcoming of newcomers?

 - Music and singing?

 - Public prayer?

 - Leading the service?

 - Teaching the Bible?

- When you arrive at church?
- Where you sit?
- How you sing?
- How you listen during the sermon?
- Who you speak to?
- How you speak to them? And what you speak about?
- What you do on Sundays? (Outside of church)

*Spend some time now **praying** for your friends who don't know Jesus. Pray for boldness and love as we invite our friends to follow Jesus with us. Pray we would also be a church that seeks to love and accomodate the outsider, ensuring that we don't put up any barriers that would stop them coming to know Jesus.*